



# 2019 Annual Report

Tompkins County Water Resources Council

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<http://www.tompkinscounty.ny.gov/committees/wrc>

# Introduction to the Water Resources Council

The Tompkins County Water Resources Council (WRC) advises the Tompkins County Legislature on matters related to water resources management and planning. The Council is also charged with identifying problems, proposing priorities, and promoting the coordination of activities in the management and protection of the County's water resources.

The WRC provides a public forum for local communities and stakeholder groups to address and discuss their concerns regarding water resources. It is the intent of the group to coordinate the water resources-related efforts of local governments, public and private institutions, and agencies and organizations throughout Tompkins County.

## Frequently Asked Questions

The public is welcome to attend WRC meetings, and Tompkins County residents are invited to apply to become voting members.

WRC membership consists of 21 voting members appointed by the Tompkins County Legislature. These members represent various water-related interests and serve on a number of standing and special committees. There are also seats for non-voting ex-officio and associate members.

To receive agendas and meeting minutes, contact the County Planning and Sustainability Department by phone at (607) 274-5560 or via email at [planning@tompkins-co.org](mailto:planning@tompkins-co.org).

Past agendas and meeting minutes can be found on the WRC website.



## Executive Committee

**Members:** Cynthia Brock (Chair), Elizabeth Cameron (Second Vice Chair), Barry Goodrich, Frank Proto (First Vice Chair)

In 2019 the Executive Committee wrote several letters of support to County, State and Federal authorities.

In April, the Executive Committee wrote to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to comment on proposed changes to the 2015 Clean Water Rule. We expressed “our wholehearted support for the 2015 definition of ‘waters of the United States’ (WOTUS) under the Clean Water Act. We believe that the 2015 Clean Water Rule definition of WOTUS is a scientifically justified approach to address human activities that can alter the integrity of aquatic ecosystems. In drafting the 2015 Clean Water Rule, the EPA and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers compiled the Connectivity Report (1) titled, *Connectivity of Streams and Wetlands to Downstream Waters: A Review and Synthesis of the Scientific Evidence*. In contrast, the proposed definition of WOTUS **ignores** the Connectivity Report and the underlying 1,200+ peer-reviewed publications.

Primary waters do not exist in isolation. If the proposed definition of WOTUS is adopted and our headwaters are unprotected by the Clean Water Act, local governments — and therefore taxpayers — will have to spend more money on efforts to abate stormwater runoff, nonpoint source pollution, exacerbated flooding, etc. These issues cost money to study, adapt to, and mitigate: **there is no zero-cost alternative.**”

In May, the Executive Committee arranged a joint meeting of the WRC and the Cayuga Lake Watershed Intermunicipal Organization to receive a presentation on the Owasco Lake Watershed Rules & Regulations development process. Speakers included representatives of the Cayuga County Planning Department, Division of Environmental Health, Owasco Lake Watershed Association, Owasco Town Supervisor Edward Wagner, and Brian Boerman of Agricultural Consulting Services.

# Executive Committee

## (continued)

In September, the Executive Committee wrote to the Tompkins County Legislature in support of the over target requests by the Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) for two new staff positions: a flood resiliency and climate conservation engineer and an agricultural conservation technician/outreach coordinator. The WRC Harmful Algal Blooms (HABs) Committee reviewed the State's HABs Action Plan for Cayuga Lake and found that it relies on SWCD to implement agricultural and non-agricultural best practices in short-term priorities and specifically states the need to increase SWCD staffing.

In September, the Executive Committee submitted to the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) a request that the WRC be notified of all major and minor water withdrawal permit applications or modifications to existing permits subject to the Uniform Procedures Act.

## 2019 Members List

### Chair

Cynthia Brock, Municipal Government

### 1st and 2nd Vice Chairs

Frank Proto, At-Large

Liz Cameron, TC Division of Environmental Health

### Voting Members

Sharon Anderson, CCETC

A. Fay Benson, Agriculture

Chris Bordlemay Padilla, Water Purveyor

Amanda Champion, Co. Government

Barry Goodrich, Watershed Organization

Ed Gottlieb, At-Large

Michelle Henry, EMC Representative

Marina Howarth, At-Large

Kristen Hychka, Municipal Government

Emelia "Mia" Jumbo, At-Large

Darby Kiley, TCDPS

Lynn Leopold, Municipal Government

Jon Negley, TCSWCD

Brian Rahm, Environment

Elizabeth Thomas, At-Large

Linda Wagenet, At-Large

### Associate Members

Mara Alper

Annie Bastoni

William George

Marina Howarth

Roxanna Johnston

Dooley Kiefer

Jose Lozano

Todd Miller

Niamh O'Leary

Steve Penningroth

Elaine Quaroni

Joanne Trutko

Tom Vawter

# 2019 Presentations

Meetings often include presentations by guest speakers, as well as by WRC members. The following talks were given in 2019:

- Feb 25th – **Tompkins County Wetlands Mapping Study**
  - Darby Kiley, TC Department of Planning & Sustainability
- March 18th – **Assessment of Emerging Contaminants in Ithaca, NY area (2014-15)**
  - Jose Lozano, Ithaca Area Wastewater Treatment Facility
- April 15th – **Cayuga Lake Watershed Intermunicipal Organization**
  - Tee-Ann Hunter, Cayuga Lake Watershed Intermunicipal Organization
- May 20th – **SPDES MS4 Permit Annual Report**
  - Angel Hinickle, TC Soil & Water Conservation District
- May 20th – **Owasco Lake Watershed Rules & Regulations Development Process**
  - Eileen O'Connor, Cayuga County Environmental Health Division
  - Edward Wagner, Town of Owasco
  - Kenneth Post, Owasco Watershed Lake Association
  - Brian Boerman, Agricultural Consulting Services, Inc.
- June 17th – **Draft Five-year Review of TC Comprehensive Plan**
  - Joan Jurkovich, TC Department of Planning & Sustainability
- Sept. 16th – **Conservation Easements**
  - Hannah George, Finger Lakes Land Trust
- Oct. 21st – **2019 Tompkins County Soil & Water Conservation District Projects**
  - Jon Negley, TC Soil & Water Conservation District
- Nov. 18th – **NYS Drug Take Back Act: Problems with the Draft Regulations**
  - Ed Gottlieb, Ithaca Area Wastewater Treatment Facility
- Dec. 16th – **Clean Water in Peril**
  - Ethan Gormley, NYPIRG

## Nominating/Membership Committee

**Members:** Jon Negley (Chair), Chris Bordlemay Padilla, and Linda Wagenet

The Nominating/Membership Committee recommends prospective members to fill vacancies on the Council, which is composed of 21 voting members, non-voting ex officio members from relevant Federal or State agencies, and associate members with committee-level voting rights. Members are chosen with the following criteria in mind: credentials, skills, experience, background, diversity, location, and length of residence in Tompkins County. The Nominating Committee reviewed applications for the five voting seats on the WRC expiring in 2019. Four current voting members were recommended for reappointment, and one new voting member was recommended. The recommendations for filling the voting seats went to the Council for approval then to the Tompkins County Planning, Energy, and Environmental Quality Committee and the Tompkins County Legislature for consideration and approval. The Committee also recommended several associate members for appointment to the WRC and presented the 2020 slate of officers for nomination.

## Water Withdrawals Committee

**Members:** Mara Alper (Chair), Liz Cameron, Marina Howarth, Roxy Johnston, John Mawdsley

The Water Withdrawals Committee gathered and compared information on water withdrawal policies and regulations that affect Tompkins County. These included regulations for local, DEC, Great Lakes Basin Compact Council, and the Susquehanna River Basin Commission.

Via a Freedom of Information Act request, the committee reviewed requests for commercial and municipal water withdrawal permits over the last several years for Tompkins County at the Syracuse DEC office. The committee concluded that communications about water withdrawals are given to local municipalities but not to counties.

The committee drafted a letter, which was approved by the WRC, requesting notification directly to the WRC for water withdrawal permit requests. The Region 7 DEC office in Cortland agreed to include WRC in all notifications of water withdrawal permit requests they receive, as well as their notifications to municipalities. Similar letters were sent to the Albany DEC and Susquehanna River Basin Commission Water Withdrawal Permits offices.



## Harmful Algal Blooms Committee

**Members:** Darby Kiley (chair), Sharon Anderson, Liz Cameron, Amanda Champion, Marina Howarth, Roxanna Johnston, Jon Negley, Steve Penningroth, Elaine Quaroni, Brian Rahm, Marjory Rinaldo-Lee, Liz Thomas

This newly formed committee is meeting the Water Quality Strategy action of establishing a regular meeting of groups working on HABs. Each meeting provides an opportunity for partners to share information about HABs monitoring and outreach. The HABs Action Plan for Cayuga Lake includes a long list of priority projects, so the committee began prioritizing actions that can be accomplished by stakeholders in Tompkins County.

## Monitoring Partnership Committee

**Members:** Roxy Johnston (chair), Darby Kiley, Jose Lozano, John Mawdsley, Niamh O'Leary, Steve Penningroth, Elaine Quaroni, Tom Vawter, and Linda Wagenet

The Monitoring Partnership primarily serves as a place to share monitoring information between several groups and the State when not working on items like the TMDL. The major accomplishment was publication of the paper titled "Long-term Study of Soluble Reactive Phosphorus Concentration in Fall Creek and Comparison to Northeastern Tributaries in Cayuga Lake, NY: Implications for Watershed Monitoring and Management" in the journal *Water*:

<https://www.mdpi.com/2073-4441/11/10/2075>.

This paper is relevant to expectations regarding the effectiveness of a phosphorus focused TMDL for Cayuga Lake.

A request was made to DEC to provide more guidance in using the Cayuga Lake Harmful Algal Blooms (HABs) Action Plan in the absence of a TMDL, because the HABs plan defers to the future TMDL for all specific information on phosphorus. No response was received.



## Municipal Workshop on Water Quality Committee

**Members:** Kristen Hychka (Chair), Sharon Anderson, Annie Bastoni, Michelle Henry, Darby Kiley, Brian Rahm

The committee held a Municipal Stream Buffer Workshop to provide municipal officials, board members, conservationists and others interested in protecting streams and wetlands with tools to improve water quality and reduce flooding and property loss in a changing climate. The event was held in at the Tompkins Center for History and Culture in Ithaca, NY, on November 21, 2019. There were 62 attendees, most from Tompkins County, with 34 municipal representatives.

Presentations and videos from the workshop were organized and shared on the Web for future reference and for municipalities and board members who could not attend.

<http://cctompkins.org/buffers>

## Education & Outreach Committee

**Members:** Lynn Leopold (chair), Cynthia Brock, Bill George, Michelle Henry, Todd Miller, Joanne Trutko, Tom Vawter

The Education Committee spent the year crafting a Clean Boating guide to Cayuga Lake, which includes a detailed map of the lake; boating amenities around the lake that can help boaters dispose of waste, find fuel and launch sites; information on best management practices for boaters that will protect lake water quality; a basic guide to identifying HABs and invasive species that threaten the lake and how to report them. The map/guide was the effort of more than a year's work to get it into a readable, usable format that could then be sent to a designer and printer. The Committee will be developing a distribution list and strategy to be sure the guide is widely available around the lake.



## Watershed Rules and Regulations Committee

**Members:** Roxanna Johnston (Chair), Annie Bastoni, Chris Bordlemay Padilla, Liz Cameron, Amanda Champion, Elaine Quaroni, Liz Thomas

The Watershed Rules and Regulations Committee reviewed the draft Owasco Lake Watershed Rules and Regulations (WRRs), released in March 2019. Members attended Owasco stakeholder meetings on the draft WRRs and helped organize a presentation about the Owasco WRR process and documents hosted jointly by the WRC and Cayuga Lake Watershed Intermunicipal Organization. The draft WRRs have been updated based on stakeholder feedback and are currently under review at the State level. The committee combined efforts with the Intermunicipal Organization to propose development of lake-wide WRRs under the authority of Bolton Point (also known as the Southern Cayuga Lake Intermunicipal Water Commission). This is an on-going discussion.



## Soil Health Committee

**Members:** A. Fay Benson (chair), Barry Goodrich, Emelia "Mia" Jumbo, Jon Negley

The Soil Health Committee organized a public meeting, held at Cornell University, on the importance of regenerative farming to protect water quality. Sixty-five people attended. The committee is developing a fact sheet for the farming community on the importance of soil health related to farming in the Cayuga Lake Watershed.

# Ad hoc Committee to Develop Job Description for Water Resources Staff Person

**Members:** Darby Kiley (chair), Liz Cameron, Roxy Johnston, Barry Goodrich, Jon Negley, Frank Proto, Brian Rahm, Liz Thomas

In August 2019, the WRC sent a letter to the Legislature requesting funding for a dedicated Water Resources staff person. The funding was not included in the 2020 budget. The letter outlined these tasks:

- Network between groups within Tompkins County and counties throughout the watershed, to help reduce duplication and to share knowledge (right hand and left hand working together).
- Work with existing action plans, such as the DEC's HABs Action Plan for Cayuga Lake and the 2017 Cayuga Lake Watershed Restoration and Protection Plan, to achieve immediate and long-term goals.
- Write and administer grants, to accelerate the pace of work on recommended action items to reduce the instances of HABs.
- Identify and organize existing data and plans, as well as identify gaps.
- Assist municipalities and agencies to take recommended actions to reduce the occurrence of HABs, such as instituting local laws, changing ditch management practices, etc.

This committee was formed to create a job description and work plan for the position and began by discussing gaps in water resource planning for municipalities and other County departments.